

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Transport Committee
 7th Floor, 14 Tothill Street
 House of Commons
 London SW1H 9NB

12th June 2014

Dear Committee Members,

Investment in the railway

TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views to this inquiry.

Question 1. What are the main features of the rail investment plan for 2014-19 (Control Period 5)? How will the railway be different in 2019 following delivery of the plan?

1. We have no comments on this question.

Question2. What is expected to happen to passenger satisfaction over this period? Is the rail industry measuring passenger satisfaction in the right way?

2. We would hope that passenger satisfaction would increase. The National Passenger Survey carried out by Passenger Focus shows disparity in satisfaction levels across the country. Northern Rail which operates local services in the North West has one of the lowest ratings for overall satisfaction. It is no surprise that this rating accords with the lack of investment in our region compared with the South. Research and statistics need to be robust, coherent, market segmented, immediate, and be available to all stakeholders. Industry surveys can be limited by "commercial sensitivity" issues and a "pat on the back" mentality.

Question 3. Is Network Rail confident that it can deliver its planned investments and meet its targets for efficiency and punctuality? How should train operators assist in ensuring that Network Rail delivers? How will the Office for Rail Regulation ensure that planned investments represent value for money?

3. The whole industry appears to be too fragmented. Do Network Rail and TOC's speak to each other sufficiently, share data and trends? Barriers to the sharing of intelligence need to be broken down.

4. Punctuality - the only measure of performance which appears to be important is whether the train is within 5 or 10 minutes of right time at its *final destination*. This is often achieved by missing out stops, never holding connections even by a few minutes as well as the general practice of padding out the last stage of the journey to tick the right boxes. Punctuality figures can also be improved (massaged?) by turning round late running trains short of their destination. This is very inconvenient for passengers.

Question 4. Has Network Rail prioritised the right schemes for the purpose of improving the railway's resilience?

5. There is a perception that the focus is on intercity travel with local and regional services having a lower priority. The key is in moving the bulk of passengers to their satisfaction and this is not being achieved in commuter markets and local leisure and social markets. Whereas the Manchester hub and NW electrification are welcome investments, much of the rest of our region is in sore need of investment.

6. "Resilience" implies workable staff policies and adequate skilled staff recruitment. Maybe we need something like a Railway Academy to address the human side of railway development.

7. Above all, we need a railway where decisions on timetabling, rolling stock allocation etc. are made by professional railwaymen and not by Civil Servants.

Question 5. How might reclassification of Network Rail as a central government body in September 2014 affect rail investment?

8. There are fears that it will then have to compete with other government departments, become more politicised and lose out on funding momentum and pace.

Question 6. Is the balance between passenger and freight investment right? What additional demand for freight movements might be released with a different balance of investment?

9. The chief problem is trying to run a wide disparity of train speeds on the same tracks. Perhaps there should be consideration of the separation of

freight and passenger lines in order to optimise both. If growth in usage continues judgements will have to be made and freight customers will not tolerate further delays, leading to a reversion to road transport.

Question 7. What will be the railway's demand for new rolling stock over the next decade and how will this demand be met?

10. Demand is going to increase. As far as the North West is concerned we are looking for a total new fleet of train units to replace the Northern fleet with diesel, maybe hybrid, units being built. However one of the biggest failings of the railway organisation is the blatant lack of a discernible strategy for rolling stock development and replacement. More notice should be taken of operators' stock requests - they have more understanding of local needs than the DfT. A major needs analysis of rolling stock needs will be necessary together with an assessment of the life expectancy of present units and a timed commitment to replace them. Pacers have to go!

Question 8. How will electrification affect the passenger experience of the railway, rolling stock requirements and rail freight?

11. As long as passengers can get a seat, have a punctual journey and pay a reasonable price, they probably do not care significantly how their train is powered. However we recognise the advantages of electrification and welcome the current rolling programme in the North West and North.

12. There is scope for more **suburban** electrification in the North West. Manchester Piccadilly to Marple (and on to New Mills), Manchester Victoria to Rochdale and the Calder Valley line are examples of further potential. The Calder Valley acts as a diversionary route for TransPennine services so this further strengthens the case. Electric trains have superior acceleration and (with regenerative braking) superior and less wasteful deceleration than diesel trains, and so they suit the frequent start-stop nature of suburban operation.

13. We have concerns about a wide network of electric tram trains with lack of on train facilities, such as toilets and low voltage operation. Also any limitations that could ensue for other heavy rail services, both passenger and freight, sharing the same tracks.

14. It would be sensible to include short branch electrification in an early stage of the programme whilst skilled staff are in the area. e.g. Windermere branch and Morecambe branch. The latter is not on the official list despite low cost, heavy local traffic congestion and a major regeneration programme.

15. Where journeys take place partly "under wires" compatibility between diesel and electric units to operate in tandem will optimise the efficiency of multi destination services and allow through services for passengers served by diesel trains on lines that will be unlikely to be electrified in the current programme. The retention of through journeys wherever possible is a major passenger requisite.

Question 9. What should be the priorities for investment after 2019 (Control Period 6), particularly in relation to connecting the classic railway with High Speed 2?

16. There has to be a total regeneration of local and regional lines to connect to HS2 and main lines with modern, comfortable, reliable and efficient rolling stock. HS2 stations should adjoin conventional stations for ease of transition to local/regional rail services

17. There must be a commitment to run HS2 services through to Liverpool and Scotland using classic lines north of Crewe and to publicly announce this in order that current confusion can be eradicated. As much HS stock as possible should be compatible with the standard network to maximise through running beyond HS2. Methods of overcoming passport and other issues to allow through services from Northern cities to the continent should also be examined.

18. Services to stations on the classic lines that will not have a HS2 service (e.g. Milton Keynes) must retain a robust set of through services. Also the lack of free capacity on the WCML north of Golborne will be significantly more marked by the time Phase 2 becomes operational. There must therefore be significant capacity enhancements carried out to this crucial section of the route (Golborne – Glasgow/ Edinburgh) in parallel with HS2 development. Passenger growth will require this anyway and HS2 will add to that growth. To give one example there are aspirations to introduce services between Liverpool and Scotland as well as ongoing enhancements between Manchester and Scotland. North West electrification will give a further impetus to growth on this corridor. Potential increases in freight should also be taken into account.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours faithfully

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse, Company Secretary